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ABSTRACT

Political scientists who teach African politics courses at U.S. colleges and universities were surveyed in 1973 to (1) discover successful teaching techniques, approaches, and texts; (2) determine the popularity of courses in African politics; and (3) collect data on the status of African politics as a research area. A questionnaire was mailed to 289 scholars and course instructors who responded to questions relating to the teaching and researching of African politics. Findings show that most respondents had conducted research and felt most familiar with Anglo-speaking countries. In regard to texts, the most popular work on African politics is "Creating Political Order: The Party-States of West Africa" by Zolberg, but a list of "great books" cannot be determined. Almond and Powell, Apter, and Huntington were named for contributing approaches to political development that are useful in planning courses, but it was emphasized that no one approach is sufficient. The teaching technique mentioned most frequently was fiction reading assignments, and Achebe's novels compete with scholarly works as assignments. Finally, enrollment in African politics courses is declining, possibly due to socioeconomic interests of students in other areas. (ND)

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"TEACHING AFRICAN POLITICS AT AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES: A SURVEY"

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"Teaching African Politics at American Colleges and Universities: A Survey"

I. General Purpose

In the spring of 1973, the authors conducted a survey of political scientists teaching African politics courses at American colleges and universities. Our intention was to collect and disseminate information about 1) the techniques used in teaching African politics, 2) the books assigned most frequently to students, 3) which political systems on the continent were most frequently emphasized in the classroom situation, and 4) the current level of student interest in African politics. Along with these data, information was also collected about those who teach African politics - i.e.,- how many have done field research in Africa, in which countries do they have the most expertise, and which approaches to political development do they find useful in teaching African politics.

The purposes of this survey were several. One was simply to collect the above information and to make it available to those who teach courses on African politics. Hopefully it will be useful to teachers in this field to know which teaching techniques, approaches, texts, etc. others have found successful in the classroom. A second purpose was to elicit comment on the popularity of African politics as an academic discipline. We hypothesized before conducting this survey that certain trends we had observed locally might be applicable nationally. In particular we felt that in the post-Viet Nam period in the United States, student interest and enrollment in comparative politics

courses, on Africa as well as other regions, might be decreasing. The possible reasons for this are multiple, but one can speculate that a mood of isolationism following the Viet Nam fiasco might affect adversely enrollment in comparative politics courses. Further, the uncertain state of the economy and continued high unemployment may induce a shift away from liberal arts courses toward more specifically career-oriented disciplines. These speculations could only be confirmed by surveying students themselves, but tentative support for such theses might come from faculty who interact with their students in an advisory capacity.

A third purpose was to collect data on the status of African politics as a research area. Our impression has been that the study of African politics is in a condition of great flux and change. By asking Africanists about books, assigned and considered important, and about approaches to political development found useful in teaching, we were endeavoring to estimate whether or not there was any consensus in this area which might indicate any specific direction that the field in general was heading.

II. Methodology

This survey was conducted through a mail questionnaire sent out to respondents in May, 1973.[1] The population polled was determined in the following way. The catalogs of 575 American colleges and universities were examined and from them a list of

course offerings on African politics by institution was drawn up. Because the focus of this study was limited to domestic and comparative African politics, courses on a single nation or on African international politics were excluded. Secondly, to ensure that the widest possible population was polled, the American Political Science Association's Biographical Directory 1973 was next consulted. From the Directory's list of scholars working on Foreign and Cross-National Institutions and Behavior (pp. 551-554), those interested in African politics were identified. Finally, this list of African scholars was matched against the roster of courses on African politics by institutions. From this procedure, a population of 289 emerged.

In May 1973, the questionnaire was mailed out to the entire population of scholars and course instructors. Five respondents replied that their college or university no longer offered a course on African politics, leaving a final usable population of 284. Of this population, 178 respondents (62.7 per cent) returned completed questionnaires, a very respectable response rate for the method employed.

III. Results

Systems Emphasized

One set of questions concerned which African political systems are most frequently emphasized in courses on African politics, and in which political systems have American Africanists done the most field research and feel they have the most

expertise. To the three questions designed to elicit this information, strikingly similar responses were given. It would appear that the same few countries on the African continent receive primary emphasis in teaching, have been the objects of field research, and are those in which American scholars feel they have the most expertise.

Table 1 below presents in percentage terms the African countries given in response to the three questions. Countries named by less than 5.0 per cent of the respondents are omitted from this table. A notable finding here was how few countries out of the more than 40 African states were mentioned by more than 5.0 per cent of the respondents. To the question "Which political systems are covered by your course(s) on African politics?" only 14 nations were mentioned by more than 5.0 per cent. Many respondents (26.9 per cent) added that their courses in terms of class presentation were oriented to conceptual approaches rather than a country-by-country analysis. However, nearly all of these respondents listed those nations used to illustrate conceptual approaches and their answers were included in the data presented. Nine African nations[2] were mentioned by no respondent as being covered in his course and 10 were mentioned[3] by only one or two.

To the questions "In which two or three African political systems do you feel you have the most expertise?" and "In which systems have you conducted field research?", only 12 political

TABLE I

COMPARISONS OF AFRICAN POLITICAL SYSTEMS MENTIONED BY RESPONDENTS IN TERMS OF TEACHING EMPHASIS, PERCEIVED EXPERTISE AND OBJECTS OF FIELD RESEARCH (IN PERCENTAGE)

Systems Emphasized in Courses		Systems in Which Respondents Feel They Have Most Expertise		Systems in Which Field Research Has Been Conducted	
Country	% of Respondents Mentioning	Country	% of Respondents Mentioning	Country	% of Respondents Mentioning
Tanzania	49.4	Nigeria	36.1	Nigeria	22.5
Nigeria	42.6	Tanzania	35.4	Ghana	15.5
Ghana	37.6	Ghana	33.7	Tanzania	14.6
Rep. of South Africa	36.5	Kenya	19.7	Kenya	14.0
Ivory Coast	35.3	R.S. Africa	19.7	Uganda	14.0
Zaire	27.5	Uganda	19.1	Senegal	11.8
Kenya	19.6	S.Rhodesia	8.4	Ivory Coast	9.0
Uganda	17.4	Senegal	7.3	S.Rhodesia	7.3
Senegal	14.0	Zaire	7.3	Mali	6.7
Liberia	7.3	Ethiopia	5.6	R.S. Africa	6.7
Guinea	6.7	Ivory Coast	5.0	Guinea	5.6
Mali	6.1	Sierra Leone	5.0	Zaire	5.0
Sudan	5.6				
S. Rhodesia	5.6				

n = 178

systems were mentioned by more than 5.0 per cent of the respondents to each question. On the question relating to expertise, 13[4] nations had no respondent claiming to be expert in their politics, and nine drew only one or two positive responses.[5] The situation was similar with regard to the field research question with eight countries[6] being researched by no respondent and eight being researched[7] by only one or two.

When the results of these questions are placed together as in Table 1, the pattern of emphasis on a few select African countries emerges. Among the 14 nations in section one and the 12 in section two and three respectively, 10 nations appear in all three - Ghana, the Ivory Coast, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, The Republic of South Africa, Southern Rhodesia, Tanzania, Uganda and Zaire. Ghana, Nigeria and Tanzania were particularly emphasized, holding down the top three positions in each column.

These data led us to several conclusions, or perhaps speculations, about African politics courses in American colleges and universities. First, the very title African politics may be a misnomer although its use is probably inevitable. The concentration on a relatively few political systems indicates that it may be difficult for scholars to present a genuinely comprehensive view of the entire continent in a single undergraduate course. The complex and dynamic politics of over 40 independent nations may not fit into a single mold or analytic framework that can be called "African." The rapidity of change within political systems

on the African continent apparently necessitates the emphasis on a few systems whose utility as explanatory models for the less researched nations is probably more a hope than a reality at the present time. In this respect the study and teaching of "African" politics may well parallel the situation so often found in courses on "European" politics where Great Britain, France and Germany are frequently emphasized while the Scandanavian countries, Spain, Austria, etc., are neglected.

A further observation from Table 1 relates to the relationship between language and the choice of countries emphasized in teaching or research. Of those 10 countries mentioned by 5.0 per cent of the respondents as ones covered in their courses, objects of field research, or those in which they had the most expertise, only three - Ivory Coast, Senegal and Zaire - are Francophonic. Guinea and Mali were the only other countries who use French at the official level to be mentioned in any category in Table 1, each being listed by more than 5.0 per cent of the respondents as countries covered in their courses and objects of field research. More extensive questioning would be needed to uncover the causes for the relative under-representation of French-speaking Africans in these categories. It does seem reasonable to hypothesize that the English language background of American scholars influences their choice of countries for teaching and research purposes. Even those who have acquired a good knowledge of French themselves, would find more research material available in English and on Anglo-phone African nations.

A second set of questions covered in this survey dealt with the background of those who teach courses on African politics. Here we were concerned not with personal background but with the kind of experiential and intellectual preparation that might affect the structure of courses on Africa. Thus we asked the respondents if they had conducted field research in any African nations, which books on Africa they considered the most important, and which general approaches to political development they found most useful in teaching their courses.

To the question "Have you conducted field research in any African Country or countries?," an astonishingly high 83.1 per cent of the respondents answered that they had, 15.7 per cent had not, and 1.1 per cent did not respond to the question. No effort was made to elicit information about the kind of field research done (delving into a country's national archives or conducting prolonged research at the village level), but apparently of those teaching African politics in the United States, a vast majority have some kind of personal experience to bring to their classroom.

The next question on the intellectual background of African scholars - "Which do you consider the two or three most important books on African politics?" - elicited an amazing variety of responses. One hundred nineteen separate titles were recorded in response to this question. Forty titles were mentioned by one respondent only, and 31 were mentioned by two only. Table 2 lists the titles of those works deemed most important by at least 5.0

TABLE 2

BOOKS ON AFRICAN POLITICS DEEMED MOST IMPORTANT BY RESPONDENTS *

Author and Title of Book	% of Respondents Mentioning
Aristide Zolberg, Creating Political Order: The Party-States of West Africa	37.6
Henry Bretton, Power and Politics in Africa	12.9
David Apter, Ghana in Transition	10.1
James Coleman, Nigeria: Background to Nationalism	8.4
Thomas Hodgkin, Nationalism in Colonial Africa	6.7
Rene Dumont, False Start in Africa	6.2
Christian Potholm, Four African Political Systems	6.2
Marion Doro and Newell Stultz (eds.) Governing in Black Africa: Perspectives on New States	5.6
Julius Nyerere, Ujamaa: The Basis of African Socialism	5.6
Donald G. Morrison, et. al., Black Africa: A Comparative Handbook	5.0
	n = 178

per cent of the respondents. What is significant here is that there seems to be no consensus among Africanists on a set of "great books" in the field of African politics. This was borne out by the high number of titles mentioned by only one or two respondents and by the 32 respondents (18.0 per cent) who said that the question was unanswerable as no books in the field could truly be considered "Classics." Zolberg's Creating Political Order is the sole work in the area which to us appears to have a significantly high number of mentions. Again, the rapidity and complexity of political change in Africa may render books out-moded in a relatively short period of time.

Similarly, there was a lack of consensus among respondents to the question "Which of the leading approaches to political development have you found useful in preparing your course(s)?" Of the 55 titles mentioned by respondents only five were listed by more than 5.0 per cent. Table 3 lists the data in response to this question. Although the works of Almond and Powell, Apter, and Huntington received mention by significant numbers of teachers of African politics, in each case, over half of those listing these works added that these approaches were helpful but not sufficient in structuring their courses. Many apparently would agree with the comment of 3.5 per cent who said that they could not respond to the question because no approach to development as yet was an adequate explanatory model. In both groups a frequently made observation was that the best approach was one's own theory or a synthesis of leading approaches to development.

The next area of investigation in this survey dealt with the techniques utilized in teaching African politics and with assigned readings and audio-visual materials. Table 4 gives the responses to a question which asked if the respondents had had the opportunity to utilize a number of teaching techniques and, if so, to assess the effectiveness of each technique used.

TABLE 3
APPROACHES TO POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT FOUND USEFUL BY RESPONDENTS

Author and Title	% of Respondents Mentioning
Gabriel Almond and G. Bingham Powell, Comparative Politics A Developmental Approach	44.9
Samuel Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies	37.1
David Apter, The Politics of Modernization	30.0
Christian Potholm, Four African Political Systems	7.9
Aristide Zolberg, Creating Political Order: The Party-States Of West Africa	7.9
	n=178

Interestingly enough, the teaching technique mentioned most frequently (by 75.6 per cent) was the assignment of works of fiction as required reading in courses. This technique was assessed by

TABLE 4

TEACHING TECHNIQUES UTILIZED BY RESPONDENTS

AND EVALUATION OF THEIR EFFECTIVENESS

Technique	Opportunity to Utilize: Yes		Opportunity to Utilize: No		Evaluation by Those Utilizing: Extremely		Moderately		Not Very	
	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
Student Discussion Panels	53.5	92	46.5	80	28.3	26	62.0	57	9.8	9
Formalized Class Debate	16.3	28	83.7	144	28.6	8	57.1	16	14.3	4
Simulations	20.3	35	79.7	137	28.6	10	71.4	25		
Audio-Visual Materials	65.7	113	34.3	59	39.8	45	56.6	64	3.5	4
Works of Fiction	75.6	130	24.4	42	70.8	92	29.2	38		
Socratic Lectures	75.0	129	25.0	43	27.1	35	69.8	90	3.1	4

70.8per cent of those utilizing it as extremely effective while 29.2per cent found it moderately effective. (Notably in Table 5 below, 3 of the 21 titles mentioned as required reading by more than 5.0per cent of the respondents were novels by the Nigerian author Chinua Achebe.) Following works of fiction as the most frequently utilized teaching techniques were Socratic lectures (75.0per cent), audio-visual presentations (65.7per cent) and student discussion panels (53.5per cent).None of these techniques, however, were found by respondents to be as effective as works of fiction. A part of this question allowed for an open-ended responses;but of the seven techniques mentioned, only student presentations of research projects and traditional lectures were listed by over 5.0per cent, receiving 12.9per cent and 23.0 per cent respectively. These latter techniques were rated as extremely effective by 58.3per cent and 53.8per cent of those using them. Overall the responses to this question indicate that few teaching techniques with the exception of works of fiction win overwhelming endorsement in terms of effectiveness.

Another question in the area asked "What are the required reading for your courses in African politics?" Of the 163 titles listed on course syllabi, only 21 were listed by more than 5.0per cent of the respondents. These are listed in Table 5. Over half (93) were mentioned only by one or two respondents. As noted above, the most frequently cited author was the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe whose three works

TABLE 5
REQUIRED READINGS LISTED BY
FIVE PER CENT OR MORE OF RESPONDENTS

Author and Title	% of Respondents Mentioning
Aristide Zolberg, Creating Political Order: The Party-States of West Africa	34.3
Chinua Achebe, A Man of the People	27.0
Marion Doro and Newell Stultz, (eds.) Governing in Black Africa: Perspectives on New States	26.4
Irving Markovitz, African Politics and Society	19.7
Christian Potholm, Four African Political Systems	19.7
Chinua Achebe, Things Fall Apart	17.4
Thomas Hodgkin, Nationalism in Colonial Africa	15.7
Victor Olorunsola, (ed.) The Politics of Cultural Subnationalism in Africa	10.7
Julius Nyerere, "Ujamaa": The Basis of African Socialism	10.1
Paul Bohannon, Africa and Africans	9.6
Wilfred Carty and Martin Kilson (eds.), The African Reader: Independent Africa	9.6
Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth	9.0
Chinua Achebe, No Longer at Ease	6.7
Roland Oliver and J.D. Fage, A Short History of Africa	6.7
John Paden and Edward Soja, The African Experience	6.7
Claude Welch, Soldier and State in Africa	6.7
Julius Nyerere, Freedom and Socialism	6.2
Heribert Adam, Modernizing Racial Domination: The Dymanics of South African Politics	5.6
Eduardo Mondlane, The Struggle for Mozambique	5.6
Ruth First, Power in Africa	5.0
Richard Gibson, African Liberation Movements	5.0

n = 178

No Longer at Ease, A Man of the People, and Things Fall Apart - were listed a total of 91 times. The highest number of mentions gained by any single title was gained by Aristide Zolberg's Creating Political Order: The Party-States of West Africa, listed by 34.3 per cent of the respondents. The top dozen or so titles listed in Table 5 enjoy a widespread usage that is certainly duplicated by few works in the audio-visual area. The 113 who asserted that they used audio-visual material frequently added spontaneous comments about the poor quality of films on Africa. Another complaint from this group concerned the difficulty involved in finding films. Many expressed the opinion that a centralized reference system for audio-visual materials was needed before these aids could be freely utilized as a teaching technique. Perhaps due to these problems, a mere 42 film titles emerged in response to the question asking which films were shown to classes. Of these, six received mentions from 5.0 per cent or more of the respondents: "Lauw" (listed by 13.3 per cent), "Tanzania: The Quiet Revolution," (10.6 per cent), "Aleuta Continua" (8.8 per cent) "Mandabi" (8.8 per cent), "Borom Sarat" (7.1 per cent), and "South African Essay: Part II. One Nation: Two Nationalisms" (5.3 per cent). A larger percentage than that given to any film was the 14.2 per cent who said they used slides, often their own taken during field research.

The final area of information we asked about concerns the status of African politics courses on the American campus. Is student interest increasing or decreasing? Are enrollments up or down? The Africanists who responded to such questions reported a median class size of 20.1 and a mean class size of 25.4. Compared to previous years, as shown in Table 6, enrollments in courses on African politics have declined more frequently than they have increased. While the largest single category (37.1 per cent) is that of respondents whose course enrollments remain constant, a total of 38.1 per cent have recorded a slight to substantial decline in enrollment in contrast to the 24.8 per cent whose enrollments have increased.

TABLE 6

RESPONDENTS' COMPARISONS OF CURRENT ENROLLMENTS AND OF STUDENT INTEREST COMPARED TO PREVIOUS YEARS

Interest and Enrollment level	Enrollment % of respondents	Interest % of respondents
Substantial Increase [a]	9.6	10.4
Slight Increase [b]	15.2	22.0
Same	37.1	46.3
Slight Decrease [b]	21.3	14.0
Substantial Decrease [a]	16.8	7.3

a = Change of 10.0 per cent or more
b = Change of less than 10.0 per cent

Delving into the reasons for changed enrollments, those who reported substantial increases or decreases in enrollment were asked for their opinions on why these changes had occurred. Taking first the responses of the 17 who reported substantial increases in their course enrollment, over half (11) gave as the primary reason the greater number of Afro-American students enrolled in their college or university. Seven cited better instruction and better course materials as factors in the increase while four listed a school requirement that students enroll in a course on non-Western political systems. Only four listed more interest among while students in African politics.

Thirty respondents reported substantial decreases in their course enrollments and gave a wide variety of reasons for this decline. Twelve speculated that the "fad" for Black Studies courses was on its way out on the American campus, and 12 reported a related decline of interest in Africa. Three commented that the institution of courses on Afro-American politics had syphoned off students from African politics courses. Sixteen mentioned their impression that a mood of isolationism and parochialism was prevalent in their universities and that China seemed to be the only foreign nation that held much interest for American students. Another category of responses cited the uncertain state of the American economy as a background factor leading to decreased enrollment. One-third (ten) of the respondents noted that diminishing job opportunities and relatively high unemployment (particularly in teaching) forced students into more career-

oriented curricula. Several here noted that students were being counseled into American politics as opposed to comparative politics, under some hazy notion that American politics might be more "job relevant." The remaining reasons for declining were more particular to individual courses. Seven respondents listed either the "toughness" of their course or the requirement of a term paper as factors depressing enrollment. Field research also was noted as having its price -four respondents added that they lost their student following after a leave of absence.

Those who do enroll in African politics courses appear overall to be enthused about the field. Another question asked respondents to give their impressions about the general level of student interest in Africa compared to students of previous years. The impression of 164 respondents are also given in Table 6. Only 21.3 per cent reported student interest levels to be lower than in previous years whereas 32.4 per cent felt that students were more interested in Africa than in the past.

IV. Conclusions

From the above responses to the survey questionnaire, several generalizations about African politics as a teaching and research area may be tentatively drawn. As an academic discipline, it seems to be highly dynamic. The very lack of consensus on books in the field--in terms of both utility for teaching and overall importance--seems to us to be a healthy sign. African politics

assuredly is an area where great breakthroughs in understanding are yet to come. Perhaps the high rate of political change on the African continent will prevent the discipline which deals with it from becoming fossilized. One can certainly hope that this is the case.

Not so encouraging from our viewpoint is the relative concentration on a few African countries as objects of research and classroom emphasis. The somewhat imbalanced selection of primarily Anglophone countries for these purposes may well distort one's perceptions of the continent as a whole. Surely our understanding of African politics would be enhanced by research on Gabon and Rwanda as well as Nigeria and Tanzania. As noted above, one cannot authoritatively speak of "African" politics as a special variant on a number of grounds, but particularly if one deals with only a few of the forty African nations.

A third generalization that may be drawn from the above data deals with teaching techniques. Although several teaching techniques are utilized by those teaching African politics courses, only one-works of fiction as assigned reading--won overwhelming support in terms of effectiveness. Presumably there needs to be much work done improving pedagogical methodology. Complementary to this finding was another--that Achebe's novels were strongly competitive with the works of such scholars as Zolberg and Doro and Stultz for placement on assigned reading lists.

Finally, it would appear that African politics courses are undergoing a small but significant decline in enrollment. Academic institutions are undoubtedly affected by events in the society within which they exist. Apparently the main factors involved in declining enrollments for African politics courses are a somewhat isolationist mood in the country, the shift by students to career-oriented courses in response to the uncertain economy, and the decreased emphasis on Black Studies courses generally.

NOTES

1. On the methodology of the mail questionnaire see Delbert C. Miller, Handbook of Research and Social Measurement (New York; David McKay Company, Inc., 1970), pp. 76-77; Julian L. Simon, Basic Research Methods in Social Science: The Art of Empirical Investigation (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 249; and Claire Selltiz, Marie Jahoda, Morton Deutsch, Stuart W. Cook, Research Methods in Social Relations(New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967),pp 241-242.

2. Botswana, Central African Republic, Gabon, Lesotho, Malagasy Republic, Malawi, Mauritius, Swaziland, Togo.

3. Burundi, Republic of Congo, Dahomey, the Gambia, Libya, Mauritania, Niger, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Upper Volta.

4. Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Republic of Congo, Egypt, Gabon, Lesotho, Libya, Malagasy Republic, Mauritania, Mauritius, Niger, Togo.

5. Botswana, Dahomey, The Gambia, Guinea, Morocco, Rwanda, The Somali Republic, Swaziland, Upper Volta.

6. Burundi, Chad, Republic of Congo, Gabon, Libya, Malagasy Republic, Mauritius, Rwanda.

7. Central African Republic, Dahomey, The Gambia, Lesotho, Mauritania, Niger, The Somali Republic, Swaziland